

**SPECIAL NEEDS ANNEX**  
**TO**  
**MADISON COUNTY DISASTER & EMERGENCY PLAN**  
**(April, 2007)**

## PURPOSE

Persons with special physical or mental needs generally manage their lives competently and enjoy a full range of activities commensurate with their limitations. Emergencies, however, can create situations in which such individuals are at greater risk than the general population. The overall purpose of this annex, therefore is to assist in identifying persons with special needs (including those who may have pets or other animals requiring special response considerations or techniques) and what those needs might be; and establish a framework within which agencies and individuals responsible for planning for, responding to and recovering from disaster and emergencies might carry out their duties most effectively as they seek to assist everyone affected to cope with the situation. This annex, therefore, supports and augments all other portions of the Madison County Disaster and Emergency Plan

## SITUATION AND ASSUMPTIONS

**Situation.** County government faces special challenges in identifying, locating and responding to the varied special needs associated with a significant number of the persons who reside in or visit Madison County. The population is diverse, frequently changes and has many reasons for being reluctant or hesitant to identify themselves as having special needs.

Awareness and response to emergency situations commonly begins with recognition of its existence through direct observation or through organized public service announcements by radio, telephone, television, and loudspeaker or by being informed by a friend or family member. Conventional response usually involves special planning and/or positive action as necessary to accommodate the problem. A significant portion of the population cannot hear, or cannot see or are not fully mobile or able to comprehend the problem or suffer from some other disability and therefore must receive special consideration in times of emergency or crisis.

In general, persons having special needs may be thought of during preparedness planning as belonging to one or more subgroups:

- Those having sensory impairments, such as reduction or loss of hearing or sight
- Persons having mobility impairments, such as loss of a limb or limbs, partial or full paralysis, reduction in range of motion and the like
- Those having mental impairments, including persons who are mentally ill as well as those suffering permanent or temporary reduced mental capacity
- Miscellaneous disabilities, including diabetes and other illness requiring special medication or treatment needs.
- Infants and elderly persons are in a special subgroup which may include features from any or all of the others. Some young children may be encountered wherein their parents or primary care-givers cannot be immediately located. It is also extremely important to remember that not every older person has special needs within the context of this annex and efforts to impose special treatment can sometimes be counterproductive.

Still others may have special needs such as those who may be non-English speaking or low-income, homeless or transient persons who may be within the area without a place of residence, means of transportation or knowledge of the county and its peculiarities.

Yet another aspect of special needs population is that of pets and other animals.

**Assumptions.** While evolving technology and growth in available resources promise to provide considerable assistance in dealing with the special needs of people impacted by crisis or emergency, in the near term the capabilities of public and private agencies to anticipate these needs will be less than perfect and/or complete. All responders and others involved in public safety planning and response must be aware that they may encounter or wish to encounter

persons having special needs and that they may have to act with initiative, creativity and, above all, with sensitivity to respond appropriately to those needs.

The media (radio, TV, internet), augmented by personal contact with family and caregivers, is the most common source of current information for persons with special needs. In some cases, the nature of their impairment may well be a barrier to such a flow of information. In other cases they may, for a wide variety of economic, social and physical reasons be denied access to these more common sources of warning and information. Ordinary procedures routinely utilized by responders, care givers and emergency managers may not suffice for those of special needs. Routine practices must therefore be adjusted accordingly.

Pet owners primarily seek specialized emergency information for pets and other animals from their veterinarians. Secondary sources include the various media, books, pamphlets and brochures and the internet. Nevertheless, emergency managers will be expected to make appropriate provisions for such animals and include procedures to care for them during all phases of an emergency to the extent that available resources will permit. Pet and livestock owners rarely include considerations of this nature when making their personal emergency plans, yet this will be a significant factor in disaster response operations in the event of an emergency.

## CONCEPT OF OPERATIONS

**General.** In general, it may be said that emergency awareness and response occurs in three stages:

- Pre-Disaster
- During a Disaster
- Post Disaster

Each of these stages embodies special planning and response procedures in order to provide appropriate care for those having special needs.

1. Pre-Disaster Functions. For purposes of this annex, the pre-disaster stage suggests a time period before the disaster itself occurs but its incidence is known to be imminent. This period may range from no time at all to several days in duration. Pre-disaster functions generally involve the warning and the ongoing provision of information necessary to maintain awareness. It also frequently involves some form of evacuation and the securing of individuals in a safer location.

2. Functions During a Disaster. When a major event is occurring, the most prominent function to be addressed is that of evacuation or moving individuals to a safer location and related rescue efforts. It also includes providing for necessary shelter, security, congregate care in shelters and the often under-appreciated need to keep participants informed. This is also the time when the resources of responding emergency personnel may be most seriously strained.

3. Post-Disaster Functions. Post disaster functions include recovery, restoration, repair, rescue, crisis counseling, on-going health care, security facilitated access to formalized governmental or institutional post-disaster assistance and, as always, the need to keep everyone involved informed.

During all three phases, preservation of human life and prevention of threats thereto is the primary objective and responsibility of all responders. Threats to pets, livestock and property are always subordinate to that consideration.

**Communications.** Communications is a critical factor throughout all phases of disaster and emergency planning and response, particularly when individuals possessing special needs are involved. And yet, traditional means of exchanging information, particularly as regards notification methods, are frequently not accessible to or usable by people with disabilities. Such a flow of information is crucial to ensure that all citizens will have the information necessary to make sound decisions and take appropriate, responsible action. Often using a combination of methods will be

more effective than relying on one method alone, such as combining visual and audible alerts, directions or notifications will reach a greater audience than either method would by itself. Emergency managers and responders will need to be sensitive and innovative.

**Identification.** There are common problems in the identification of disabled and elderly which emergency managers must appreciate. As a rural county of small population, most of those suffering from some form of impairment are known to the community in which they reside. As the county grows, however, there will more than likely be an increasing trend toward anonymity. New or seasonal persons may not be known by the community at large. Some special needs persons may avoid being identified as such because they fear heightened vulnerabilities to crime or they may fear social discrimination or threat to their employment if their disability is revealed. And some just do not want to accept their limitations.

Many of the persons having special needs may be involved in full or part-time institutional care. Clinics, hospitals, retirement homes and licensed care facilities form the core of the special needs population. Many receive care in their own home or those of family and friends, however. Organizations such as "Meals on Wheels", local churches, or senior citizen agencies may be of assistance here, as may the Public Health Department.

The Citizens Corps Council (CCC) maintains an ongoing program which seeks to identify those who may have special needs in time of emergency or crisis. In times of emergency, the intent is that this information will be made appropriately available to responders and emergency personnel. At other times, security of this information must be maintained at all times and access thereto must be extremely limited.

**Evacuation and Sheltering.** Accessibility is the key in providing for access to modes of transportation and the various forms of shelter which may be provided. Until such time as all shelters have accessible parking, exterior routes, entrances, interior routes, toilets, provisions for refrigeration of medications and other back-up power requirements and the like, emergency managers will need to widely publicize to the public and to the response community the locations of the most accessible emergency facilities and what capabilities and limitations may be associated with each. Consideration of procedures and facilities to accommodate people with disabilities who use service animals so that they will not be separated from these important aids must be included in planning and response throughout all phases of disaster and emergency management.

## **DIRECTION AND CONTROL**

### **Responsibilities.**

1. Board of Commissioners:
  - a. Provide for the development and maintenance of a county program or programs aimed at identifying and rendering specialized assistance during times of disaster or emergency to persons of special needs as defined herein.
2. Director of Emergency Management:
  - a. Provide for consideration of the special needs of the population in emergency planning throughout the county. Ensure that such consideration encompasses the special needs of pets and livestock in addition to transients and others with unique needs or disabilities.
  - b. Conduct an annual review and update of this Special Needs Annex, coordinating this process with the Local Emergency Planning Committee and the Public Health Administrator. Ensure appropriate consideration is given to pets and livestock as well as humans with special needs
3. Public Health Administrator:

a. Act as a focal point for awareness of special needs that exist or may be expected to exist in the area and seek to enhance such awareness throughout the entire spectrum of emergency services. Administer an ongoing program aimed at facilitating a productive dialogue between those having special needs service providers. Encourage and facilitate incorporation of specialized rescue techniques and other consideration of special needs into the training and exercise programs of county fire departments, EMS providers, law enforcement officers and other emergency responders and care providers.

b. Seek to involve those with experience and those with specialized needs themselves in the emergency planning process, particularly as relates to evacuation, the provision of shelter and matters of recovery.

c. Coordinate emergency planning by the Director of Emergency Management, the LEPC, Citizens Corps Coordinator and such other agencies and officials as may be appropriate to meet special needs.

d. Consider specialized requirements for transportation, rescue and shelter when planning for emergencies. Such consideration will be required for pre-incident planning, incident response and post-incident recovery.

e. Establish a plan for routine follow-up visitation during times of emergency to ensure that the ongoing and frequently changing needs of the special care community are known and met by responders and care-givers.

f. Ensure that the veterinarian representative to the County Public Health Board is available and active throughout all phases of an emergency.

4. Citizens Corps Coordinator:

a. Administer an ongoing program aimed at identifying and facilitating the ability of authorized responders and caregivers to locate persons within the county having special needs in case of disaster or emergency. Such a program will include coordination with churches, care facilities, senior citizen centers and other government and non-governmental organizations that may be conducting related or supportive efforts with such persons.

b. Seek to identify members of the CERT community and other volunteers who may have unique skills that may be useful in responding to special needs before, during and after an emergency. Such skills might include knowledge of a foreign language or American Sign Language; experience with certain disabilities; or familiarity with federal and/or state emergency management programs.

## ADMINISTRATION

**General.** Administration and record keeping lack the “glamour” of hands-on disaster or emergency response, yet the importance of such activity cannot be overstressed. Detailed record keeping and timely, accurate processing of administrative matters plays a major part in response to such a situation and will, in all probability, play a key role in effective recovery efforts.

**Emergency Service Contracts.** All contracts for emergency services or related services during a disaster or emergency must require providers to follow appropriate steps to accommodate those having special needs. Contract terms must be routinely reviewed to ensure that they meet the accessibility and other special needs which may be encountered.

### References:

1. PETS Act (Pets Evacuation & Transport Act of 6 Oct, 2006)
2. Disaster Related Needs of Disabled & Elderly (EMI Pub SM 191)
3. ADA Guide for Local Governments (Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section publication)